

Expatriate Chess On the Other Side Of the Wall

By EARL SHORRIS

STATINTL

Communists are in duty bound not to gloss over the shortcomings in their movement, but to criticize them openly so as to remedy them the more speedily and radically.

—V. I. LENIN
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NO one dreams of East Germany any more; it was not the answer. Anyway, there is a New Left now, with different dreams. East Germany has become that place behind the wall where bombed-out buildings harbor dreary little fictional spies. And the chief dreamer, Gerhart Eisler, archetypal revolutionary of the Old Left, prince of bail jumpers, mastermind of defections, is gone now, dead shortly before the dawning of the Age of Aquarius.

But East Germany is real. Industrial output increases; the wall grows toward adolescence; Moscow, Bonn and Berlin negotiate; the bombed-out buildings are replaced by precast concrete honeycombs; Socialist planning decrees wide, empty streets, and a tiny group of editors and writers from the West lives on in East Berlin. They are growing old now, these East Berliners who remember the West. There are widows and widowers among them. They are weary visionaries. Their hopes have been scarred by purges, the non-aggression pact, Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, the N.K.V.D., the K.G.B.; but they remain in East Berlin—proof, perhaps, of the durability of dreams.

The dream is vacant. Where is everyone? At work. The empty streets are the result of full employment. Gray is the color of full employment. The sound of Socialist planning is quiet. A surly city behind a wall. The ordinary people of East Berlin may not cross that wall until

they are 60 years old. It was built to contain the human resources of the German Democratic Republic, a monument to the quality of life in the G.D.R.

AMONG those few who may cross the wall are the dreamers who came from the West to build Socialism. Hilde Eisler, widow of Gerhart, has just returned from Paris. In 1947, when she and Gerhart lived in Queens and in court, Life magazine called her "the beautiful Brunhilde." She was the romance in the Eisler case: a Polish Jew, she had worked in the underground for three years before she and Eisler fled to Mexico to escape the Gestapo. The years in East Germany have been like brine on her beauty. The editor in chief of Das Magazin, the most popular magazine in East Germany, is a measuring woman; her steps are precise, the degree of fashion in her clothes and the shape of her eyeglasses have been planned. Coffee is served; if one guest will not drink coffee, then no one will drink anything.

"I was three years in the underground," she says, as if to offer an explanation. It is the only explanation she offers to anyone. When her husband died, people she had known for years tried to comfort her, to be close, but she rejected them, preferring to remain alone. Her reputation is for such toughness; it is in her manner and in her eyes. There must be limits to what one person can know before the eyes refuse to see any more.

That is an unfair judgment. There are vulnerabilities yet. She asks about those members of the Old Left who stayed in America. They are published in Das Magazin, paid in hard currency. Life is difficult for them in America. Couldn't they move to East Berlin? "Don't be naive," she answers. "How would they live?"

There is a writers' union. . . .

She laughs. "We haven't got Communism yet. Writers must sell their work. If it's popular, they get a lot of money. They must negotiate with publishers. To make a living in the G.D.R. a writer must work very hard. For the free artist it is no different here than in the West."

She prefers to talk about the magazine. "We have a paper shortage. We can't print enough copies. When the magazine comes out, you must have a friend at the newsstand to get a copy. He will hide it underneath for you. That's why you never see it on the newsstands."

"This is one reason why the magazine is so popular," she says, opening a copy to a photograph of a naked girl. "Every issue we publish a picture of a naked girl. The people open right at this page. The girls are naked, but it is artful, not obscene." She smiles. "These are the only pictures of naked girls published in the Socialist countries."

She thumbs through the rest of the issue. There is a translation of a story by Damon Runyon, a poem by Oscar Wilde, a story, an art feature, a music feature, a bit of propaganda, a color spread of a pretty girl in a white net bikini posing on rocks, a bit of Egyptian archaeology, a cartoon reprinted from The New Yorker, another cheesecake photograph and a page of classified ads. There are full-page ads for perfume, cameras, cosmetics and dairy products. The stories are short and the paper is poor except for the slick pages on which the cheesecake is printed, but the magazine strives toward an atmosphere of affluent liberalism. It is sophisticated, in touch with the West; the editor has just returned from Paris. Outside the window of her office one can see a park, the Brandenburg Gate and the wall. It is a wall for them, not for her. She has been a Communist for more than 30 years. She was married for 26 years to

EARL SHORRIS wrote "The Death of the Great Spirit, an Elegy for the American Indian," published last week.

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